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ABSTRACT

Results of a survey of school district data processing directors' attitudes toward the content of technology curriculum in educational administrator training programs are presented in this paper. Questionnaires sent to 152 large school districts yielded 78 usable returns, a 51 percent response rate. Respondents rated the following topics as most important for inclusion in a general introductory computer course in educational management: productivity software applications; school management tools; and general educational technology subjects. The findings raise questions, however, as to the feasibility of incorporating large amounts of information into one or two introductory courses. (LMI)

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EDUCATIONAL DATA PROCESSING DIRECTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF TECHNOLOGICAL TRAINING PRIORITIES FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

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EDUCATIONAL DATA PROCESSING DIRECTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF TECHNOLOGICAL TRAINING PRIORITIES FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

W. C. Bozeman*, D. W. Spuck°

ABSTRACT

This study reports the results of a survey of data processing professionals in medium to large U.S. school districts. The purpose of the survey was to solicit opinions and positions regarding the content of technology curricula in educational administrator and leadership preparation programs. Prior studies by the authors have shown a growth in this area of the university programs, but an absence of well-defined course content. Results of the survey revealed agreement as to the need for certain content such as productivity software and instructional technology. The survey raised questions, however, as to the degree to which such a large amount of information and knowledge can be included in one or two courses.

INTRODUCTION

Many forces are reshaping systems of public education in the United States. The growing complexity and accountability of public schools, coupled with technological advances available to assist with the management of schools, has heightened the importance of technology in preparation programs. Administrative application of computers has been a topic in educational leadership programs for over 20 years, but most have only included such courses within the past few years. Only a minority of such programs require such coursework as a part of degree and certification programs (Spuck & Bozeman, 1987).

While typical early applications of the computer in the management of schools paralleled those in business (e.g., inventory control, budgeting and accounting, payroll and personnel records), educational computing soon included applications more specific to the operation of schools: student scheduling, grade reporting and bus routing. The range of computer applications in school management and instruction has been discussed by Charp et al. (1982), Gustafson (1987), Richards (1989), Bozeman (1985), Miller (1988) and Crawford (1987). Emerging are applications of such technology as local area networks and artificial intelligence.

Spuck and Bozeman (1987) completed a survey of university departments of educational administration, obtaining information on the extent of course offerings and course content related to the preparation of school administrators about computer use in schools. Results indicated that there has been a recent growth in the inclusion of such coursework in preservice training programs, but that there was no standard curriculum. The nature and content of computer application courses varied greatly in structure and content. Additionally, it was noted that students taking these courses varied greatly in backgrounds and experiences in computing which they bring to computer courses; to some extent, this may account for the variation in course content which was evident.

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The earlier study examined course content from the perspective of what was actually being taught as a part of administrator training programs and from an example of what was required by the state of Florida for certification (Florida Educational Leadership Examination). The present study is designed to elicit responses of data processing directors of large school districts as to what they feel ought to be included in university courses training school leaders. The data processing professionals were queried about their views of technological training priorities because they are familiar with educational applications of technology, emerging aspects of technological training and development, and since they work with school administrators on a day-to-day basis.

METHOD

A survey instrument was designed which listed possible computer applications and computer-related issues which might be included in a general introductory course in the use of computers in educational management. The instrument was pilot tested with 10 school districts and revised based on the responses. The final instrument included a list of 22 possible topics and provided space for additional topics which a respondent might wish to add. The data processing directors were asked to respond to each topic on a five-point scale from "essential" (to be emphasized in the course) to emphasize "not at all." Questionnaires were sent to 152 districts listed as IPASS members. Of these, 78 usable surveys were returned for a 51% total response.

RESULTS

Analysis of the surveys indicates that the two most important topics, in the opinion of the respondents, are: word processing and student scheduling. Three additional topics considered important were organizational impacts of automation, software and hardware evaluation and selection, and ethical/legal issues. Topics considered least important were computer programming, videodisk technology and project management. When asked to rate applications on a five-point scale, the respondents' perceptions of important topics included spreadsheets, data base/filing systems, security and privacy issues, and computer-based education and instructional technology.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The opinions of the data processing professionals do not appear inconsistent with the directions presented by Spuck and Bozeman (1987). Emphasis toward three clusters of topics appear: (1) productivity software applications (word processing, spreadsheets, and data base systems); (2) school management tools (student scheduling, accounting, record keeping, and reporting); and (3) general educational technology topics (computer-based education, legal/ethical issues, evaluation, and instructional technology strategies). Obviously, time constraints would permit only a brief exposure to such a wide range of topics, if they were all addressed in a single introductory course. The large body of knowledge will almost certainly require a rethinking of how technology-related topics are presented.

Administrators must learn how to use the tools of technology, as one respondent suggested. Regrettably many, if not most, educators have little understanding of technology and its implementation, or its

possible uses in administrative or instructional decision making. Perhaps most important is how technology will change the educational process. This requires an understanding of possibilities and limitations, in addition to specific concepts and skills.

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